

How not to get lost, or I spent a bunch of money and I got what I paid for!

Have you ever been lost? I mean really lost, like you have absolutely no idea where you are and you can't find anyone to help you? Even worse, have you ever been lost because the map you have is totally useless? No one speaks English, and there's no where to pull over and ask for directions.

I've only been truly lost twice in my life. The first time was a few years back in the German city of Köln. What should have been an easy trip directly through the city via the Autobahn turned into a nightmarish two-hour experience of missed turns, unmarked roads and total confusion. Armed with three maps we brought with us from our local AAA we still couldn't navigate our way through the city, surprising to us because PK and I consider ourselves to be seasoned travelers who next to never have a problem finding our way around. We've successfully driven all throughout Mexico, Europe and Eastern Europe (even though my father still insists it's called "Central Europe"). We've navigated through Budapest and driven through the bowels of Paris, but for some reason Köln was our undoing. I'm not sure if it was the fault of the map, or the fact that the Germans were lacking in personality and assistance, but Köln was our nemesis.

The second time I was hopelessly lost was when I got off the plane in Washington DC last year to attend our very own Grudgerace. Arriving at Ronald Reagan International at about midnight, carrying AAA street level maps and a list of driving directions I'd printed out from Mapquest turned out to be pointless. In the darkness the city seemed to be all rearranged, scrambled and with a total lack of street lighting and signage. A trip that should have taken me half an hour ended up taking two hours. I'm not sure if it's because of a post 9/11 lockdown on the city in an effort to confuse the Taliban, but it damn well confused the heck out of me.

A year later the tables have turned on getting lost as Bikeland has spent months testing one of Garmin's most sophisticated offerings, the 2820. Now, I've never been one to even consider using a GPS, it's what I would call a "crutch", so when the offer of a long term test came from Garmin and Autoland, we were skeptical but since we were headed on a 5000 mile road trip we thought it was the perfect opportunity for us to see if an expensive gadget like this is really worth the coin.

The 2820 isn't cheap. Buying one will set you back just under a grand. In the Garmin lineup, the 2820 is what I would classify a "crossover" unit. Designed to work on both a motorcycle and a car. Garmin claims the 2820 is waterproof up to one meter of water and comes equipped with some



extremely powerful mapping and navigation aids including an unbelievably extensive point of interest (POI) database. Unlike its motorcycle specific counterpart, the Zumo, the 2820 has right hand controls and does not have an internal battery which means that if you want to take it inside your tent, in your hotel room or into the bar at the end of a long ride, you'll need to bring the AC adapter with you and have access to a power source of some kind.

As a GPS newbie, I was disappointed by the overall size of the unit. The 2820 (and the Zumo for that matter) remind me a bit of the original Motorola "Shoe Phones". Garmin offers smaller, more compact units but they simply don't have the mapping and Nav capabilities that the 2820 offers, and as an important note for a motorcyclist or boater, the majority of the other units aren't waterproof.

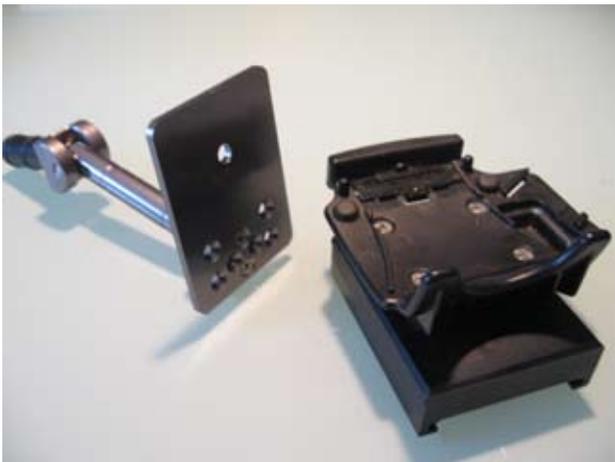
We mounted the 2820 to several motorcycles including our long-term test ZX-14s from Kawasaki Motors Corp. USA using a Techmount from High Gear Specialties and the Garmin motorcycle mounting kit. The only complaint we had about the Garmin mount was that to securely lock the unit in the cradle, Garmin wants you to close the upper clasp on the cradle and then tighten it down with a tiny tamper proof torx screwdriver (provided).



This was pointless as we simply didn't feel safe leaving a high dollar item like the 2820 (that we didn't own!) permanently mounted to the bike (that we didn't own!). Stealing the 2820 would be a breeze. Consequently we never tightened down the locking screw - this led to another problem; on two separate occasions the unit launched itself out of its cradle while traveling at high speed. Good thing PK has quick reflexes!



Techmount is prototyping a fix (below) but it's still being tested.



So does the Garmin deliver as promised? We weren't sure so we packed a huge stack of paper maps just in case. They turned out to serve a purpose as one of the only downsides we could find with the Garmin was the lack of a "tactile feel" that a map offers. There's something to be said for being able to unfold a map on a table and look at it. Since the Garmin is limited to its screen size you can't really look at a whole state or city in the same way you can on a paper map. This takes some getting used to, but once you're over it this is really a bit of non-issue because the rest of the unit's features are so unbelievably cool that it just doesn't matter.

You'll never get lost again.

That's pretty much a given, because this unit is really wild and what it can do will floor you. Entering information is easy with the touch screen controls. Type in your destination and you're off. Turn by turn voice instructions follow and we jacked the 2820 into our helmets using the external input on our Chatterboxes so that we could hear them while we rode.

The voice commands can be pretty hilarious as you try to get used to the pronunciation errors the computer spits out. Errors in pronunciation were often attached to abbreviations, an example was "Marine Drive" (displayed in text on screen as "Marine Dr") being called out loud as "Marine Doctor" or "Burrard Street" (displayed in text on screen as "Burrard St.") being called "Burrard Saint".

Some of the other pronunciation errors might be enough to get you killed if you're pegged as being a starry eyed tourist. Don't rely on the Garmin to teach you how to say something. "Robson Street" is pronounced "Rob-sun" not "Robe-sun". Walmart is "Wall-Mart", not "Whale-Mart". Either way it is a source of entertainment and is guaranteed to make you laugh.

The 2820 is unique in the Garmin lineup in that you can insert multiple waypoints in a route, meaning that you can add in several destinations and ask it to calculate the shortest distance between all of them. This is a really cool feature. The only other unit to sport this feature is the newly released Zumo, and we were disappointed that other Garmin units (especially the Nuvi series) didn't offer this capability.

The 2820 also sports the totally amazing XM Nav feature. This requires the purchase of an external XM antenna and a special \$4 a month XM Nav subscription. Using the (sadly) large magnetic hockey puck size XM antenna provided, the Garmin pulls rich traffic data off of the XM satellite and then builds it into its route calculations.



We tested the XM Nav feature in 4 major West Coast cities: Los Angeles, Sacramento, Portland and Seattle. In LA the Nav feature was worth its weight in gold and shaved hours and hours off of our daily driving. With the XM connected, the Garmin had the uncanny ability to guide you to off ramps and steer you past traffic slow downs, then drop you right back on the freeway when the traffic was moving again. Its accuracy in LA was unnerving. The Garmin would indicate traffic stopped ahead, and was bang on every time. The Nav feature did not work as well in Sacramento or Seattle, and in Portland wasn't much help at all. If you live in LA or another major city it's worth checking into XM coverage for this feature, and if you're in LA it's a must have.



We wish Garmin would make a smaller XM antenna. The antenna that came with my Delphi RoadyXT is miniscule, but the heavy giant Garmin version was so cumbersome that at one point it even flew off my car and was left dangling from its cord. The other downside to the XM antenna is that its connector is trapped in place by the power connector for the 2820 making it slightly unfriendly to disconnect. We never left the unit in an unattended vehicle, and I don't know if you would want to either. This meant some level of inconvenience in disconnecting the 2820 when taking it with you.

For added features the 2820 has a built in XM receiver so with the XM antenna and a full subscription it becomes your XM radio. It's also a built in MP3 player and has a huge amount of onboard memory if you want to

load in a ton of songs, maps or audio books (another good idea for long road trips).

The power connector for the unit is a shoe that slides into the back of the unit sideways. Curiously, the connector (bucking standard convention) *appears* to have the live male leads exposed. In the car this isn't an issue as the paddle shaped cigarette lighter plug (equipped with a speaker for the audio commands) would most likely have its power shut off when you turned off the ignition. Car interiors are plastic so the chances of shorting it out are next to none, but this isn't the case on a bike. Bikes are made of metal and we were really worried about the exposed connectors grounding out on the triple clamp or gas tank. PK solved the problem by attaching the cord to the Techmount with a hair elastic. Granted, Garmin supplies a little plastic boot for you to cover the connector with when not in use, but we lost that almost immediately. How many things does a person need to carry around these days? It would be great to see a different kinda of connector that didn't have this potential issue. Voice commands in your car are issued through a speaker built into the cigarette lighter adapter.

The Garmin has become a part of our everyday lives, providing us with travel information we thought we'd never need. Where's the nearest Starbucks? Ask the Garmin and it'll send you there. The next rest area? The nearest hotel? It does it all, and on top of it, it not only takes you there but it also give you the full address and phone number of where you're going AND if you have a Bluetooth enabled phone, it will call the number



for you! No more 411! POI coverage in the US was fantastic. In Canada it was fantastic in major cities, but pretty sketchy in nowhereville. This may be solved in the future with a specific Canadian POI database (if offered), but hey... who lives in Canada anyways, eh?

The following is an example of why the Garmin is an indispensable travel tool (and this really happened to us this summer)

PK and I were somewhere on the coast of Northern California onboard KMC's ZX-14s when the fuel range indicator began flashing 30 miles left to empty. We pulled into the nearest town, and it was a one-horse town. No one there, most stores boarded up and a run down garage was doubling as a no-name gas station. Preying on tourists running out of gas, this place couldn't have been any more of a stereotype than it already was. The only thing missing was the screeching vulture and the tumbleweed rolling down the street to complete this picture. We



pull up to the decrepit old mechanical gas pump and out walks the gas station attendant. Living up to the stereotype (this only gets better, so keep reading because I'm not making it up) the grungy guy is covered in grease and a few missing teeth. He walks up to us and says "Gas is 3.90 a gallon but the old pumps wont go that high so I've recalibrated them to pump in half gallons" as he lifts the handle and brings the hose towards the ZX-14s. PK and I shoot a glance at each other. Can this be real?

"So, wanna filler up", snorts toothless guy.

"Give us a sec to talk", I tell him and I motion him away. We look down at the Garmin and enter this simple sequence of commands: "FIND" > "FUEL" > "NEAR HERE". In two seconds the Garmin spits out the data. Thirteen miles down the road is a Chevron and a 76.

"No thanks", I tell toothless guy as we leave him in the dust. He looked so disappointed. You'd think this was the first time someone didn't buy his half gallon recalibrated gas! We smiled as we pulled into the real town and the 76 where gas was 70 cents a gallon cheaper and people had teeth.

Fast forward to today. I'm sitting on a plane headed to Washington DC

and the Grudgerace. This time I'm not worried about getting lost at all. Thankfully Autoland let us keep the Garmin for one extra week so I could use it in DC and find my way around. I didn't even bring a paper map this time. With the 2820 I'm golden, whether I'm in a car or on a bike I know I'll get there and I wont get lost. Granted some of the directions aren't as intuitive as they might be if you knew the area like the back of your hand, but to show up in a part of the world you know nothing about and to be able to drive around not looking like a lost tourist is a Godsend.

I'll never travel without a GPS again. Now I have to go buy one. Just placed my order. I hate that!

To find out more about the Garmin 2820 and other Garmin products, visit their website at www.garmin.com

To find out more about GPS mounting equipment, visit High Gear Specialties at www.techmounts.com.

To find out more about other cool GPS stuff, check out www.autoland.ca